

Defeating Resistance

Implementing change requires effective change agents.

Why do the results of even good plans and strategies sometimes fall short of our expectations in the execution? Because we make the mistake of focusing solely on strategy and planning. In fact, that is thinking about change, not “implementing” change. The implementation can be far more difficult than the planning. The reason: people. People have different reactions and points of view, different interests and needs. People decide whether to help, hinder or ignore any change initiative. People – your customers and prospects – hold the key to your success as a distribution rep.

Successful change agents all possess a vital ability. They understand the importance of gaining support for any change initiative and they are able to obtain people’s “willing buy-in” to change. They recognize their customer/prospect’s emotional as well as logical reactions and are able to reason with any point of view. Only then are they able to link their customer/prospect’s best efforts to the execution of sound recommendations.

Buy-in is a powerful thing. It takes the customer out of analysis or skepticism and causes commitment – the emotional resolve to act and see a task through to completion. Without it, change initiatives i.e. your recommendations, are doomed from the start. With it, you get people on board (leadership) and working in sync (teamwork) on an on-going, daily, product by product basis.

“But people resist change.”

I cannot tell you how many times I have heard this excuse as an explanation for the lack of success. And it is just that – an excuse.

Consider yourself. I’ll bet you are wearing something different today than you wore yesterday. I’ll bet you will eat something different today than you ate yesterday. And so it goes with everyday being slightly different than the previous day.

So if we don’t resist change, why is it so hard getting our customer’s buy-in to a change in say heartworm preventative?



By Patrick T. Malone

When you get a hard stop do not assume you know the reason behind it.

There are five generic barriers that effective reps are able to manage before they attempt to gain buy-in to any change:

1. Apathy.
2. Too much work to implement your recommendation
3. Too much risk that your recommendation may not work as well.
4. Opposition to your recommendation.
5. Skepticism about your recommendation.

Each of these barriers has an emotional component and a logical component. Effective change agents know you MUST acknowledge the emotional component first before you can begin to reason with the logical. So let’s look at how that might play out for each barrier.

Apathy

“Why bother, it won’t make any difference?”

(Said with low energy, little or no eye contact and a sense of other priorities.)

Acknowledge the emotion first or in this case the lack of emotion.

“Sounds like a change in your heartworm preventative is not a priority at this moment in time...”

You have proven you have not only heard them but you are taking their point of view seriously. There is actually very little you can do if it is real apathy. If it isn't, then acknowledging it as if it was will elicit a different response – one that is more easily managed.

Now you can transition to the logical side.

“...so it makes sense to deal with those products that are a priority. What might those be?”

Too much work

“It’s hard enough to get my client’s to comply with the heartworm regimen let alone explain why I have switched brands.” (Said with a complaining or even a whining tone.)

Acknowledge the emotion first.

“Compliance is a universal problem and we don’t want to add to your workload...”

You have just proved that your customer has your full attention and you are taking their complaint seriously. And you have opened the door to a logical solution such as:

“...so let’s look at supporting material supplied by the manufacturer to educate your customers as well as a unique program they have developed that will actually increase compliance.”

Too much risk

“What I use now works. Why take the risk of introducing a different product that may or may not be as effective?”

Acknowledge the emotion first.

“It is reasonable to measure the risks involved in taking on a new product or a different brand...”

You might not see a risk in switching heartworm preventative brands, but you have acknowledged your customer’s right to that emotion at this moment in the conversation. That respect opens your customer to options to mitigate or eliminate the perceived risks, i.e.

“...so let’s look at the active ingredients in my recommended product before making any decision on moving forward with a change.”

Opposition

“Absolutely not.”

When you get a hard stop do not assume you know the reason behind it. Just because yesterday’s NO was due to price or quality or prior experience doesn’t mean today’s NO is for the same reason. Remember to acknowledge the emotion first.

“Got it. Let’s stop here...”

Time for some probing that could be a simple as

“...sounds like there is a problem. Can you help me understand it?”

Or it may require some in depth probing using NIQCL (Need/Problem, Importance, Quantify, Consequence, Look/Listen).

Quite frankly, you must deal with the logical component so you know and fully understand the problem(s) causing the opposition.

Skepticism

“You are going to have to justify your recommendation before I change heartworm preventatives.”

Skepticism can be a challenge if you have not done your homework. You need to know the competitive advantage your recommendation provides as well as be able to translate that into a benefit you customer will have as a result on acting on your recommendation. But acknowledge the emotion first.

“Skepticism at this point is perfectly understandable...”

And then transition to the logical component.

“...so let me show you the reasons I believe the switch is justified and the benefits you will gain as a result of that decision.”

Adapt these generic barriers to the specific points of resistance you encounter in your territory and then sharpen your skills at acknowledging the emotion before transitioning to a logical discussion that justifies your recommendation. In that process you will be an effective change agent and a very successful distributor rep. ■